FutureMusic Platinum Award

SPECS

Polar Pattern: Cardioid
Frequency Range: 20Hz to 20kHz
Sensitivity: 32mV/Pa OR -30+/-2dB
Output Impedance: <200 ohms
Equivalent Noise Level: 2-dB(A)
Max SPL (0.5% THD@1000Hz): 120dB
With -10dB pad: 130dB
With -20dB pad: 140dB

Connectors
At microphone output: 7-pin XLR-type
At power supply output: 3-pin XLR
Power Requirement: Switchable custom power supply

Dimensions
233.3 x 63mm

Lauten Audio Horizon | £649

Looking for a high-quality tube microphone full of character? ***Jono Buchanan*** introduces the Horizon…

WHAT IS IT?
A large diaphragm, tube mic from Lauten Audio

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HIGHLIGHTS
1 Lovely sound
2 Wide SPL
3 Solid, attractive construction

Lauten Audio is a name you might not have come across before, despite the increasing numbers of top-end producers lining up to endorse its product range. The newest addition to its family of microphones is a tube model ambitiously titled Horizon. Promising wide SPL, rugged construction and, most importantly, a sound all of its own, this mic can certainly talk the talk. Let's check how it walks…

On the stand

The microphone ships in a smart silver briefcase, which contains the microphone, its shock-mount suspension cradle, an alternative smaller 'hard' stand clip and its unique power supply unit. The latter acts as a transformer, featuring a recessed voltage switch that can be toggled to run at either 120 or 240V, thereby providing compatibility with power inlets the world over. Power to the microphone is passed along a bespoke 7-pin cable, with connection from the power supply to your preamp or audio interface a standard XLR lead.

Physically, the microphone itself is built like a tank and stylistically, is designed with a nod towards Blue's range of mics, with the main body sitting below a protruding round grille. Within this section lies the large diaphragm, with its military-grade vacuum tube. The capsule is internally shock-mounted and is fixed in a cardioid pattern and the only control you have on the mic's body itself is a small and slightly fiddly rocker pad switch, which can be shifted from 0 to provide -10 or -20dB of roll-off. At the -20 position, Lauten claim SPL of 140dB which is pretty impressive.

Certainly, this means that a wider variety of applications could be considered for this microphone than is usually the case for tube mics and testimonies on Lauten's website claim that great results were achieved on drums and guitar amps, alongside the more traditional uses – vocals, acoustic guitars and strings. I tested it both on spoken and sung vocals, as well as on solo violin and was hugely impressed.

The microphone takes a good 10 minutes to warm up but once at operating temperature, it oozes quality. The sound is slightly coloured but in a pleasing, warm way and its most impressive quality is that it smoothes any volume or frequency spikes to produce a balanced performance which effortlessly slots into any mix. Here's a microphone which doesn't need to be propped up either by a preamp or by a 'fix it' chain of EQ and compression plug-ins at the mix stage – the sound direct from the mic is really that good.

Touch the Horizon

With the quality of affordable microphones improving all of the time it would be easy to over-look this mic in favour of cheaper alternatives. However, this mic genuinely competes for quality with models many times the price and should you have funds available, you won't regret buying the Horizon. The fact that a great sound can be achieved without a posh preamp also means that you'll save money if you're putting together an input channel from scratch.

Its sound is wonderful – completely unfussy and yet warm and rich and different. Here's a sound you can build the rest of your mix around and it's been added to my 'must have' list once the financial storm clouds dissipate. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

An all-purpose tube microphone? A rare and glorious thing. The Horizon is worth every penny.